

Growing into Something by Escapaeronaut

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Summary:

Steve is trying to become someone better than who he was in high school. So when Hopper offered him a chance to become an officer, Steve decided to give it a try. But you don't get to just get a badge and a gun, and you don't get to start all over in the same town.

Growing into Something

Author's Note:

Eh, this was going to be something bigger, but it's not gonna happen. *shruggie emoji*

The BMW lofted over the bump at the entrance to grocery store and Steve pulled it into a spot at the far end. There were a few patches of snow in the shadowed corners of the store, left over from the storm on Thursday. He had been on the road for about two hours with only one stop for gas. He climbed out, stretched and looked around, not recognizing any specific cars. It would have been awkward at this point to run into Tommy and Carol or god forbid Billy. He made his way past the other cars and dodged a young mother with a baby as they came out. Steve caught the door behind them, hooked his sunglasses in the zipper of his jacket.

Though his parents had seemed disappointed when he didn't come home for Thanksgiving, they couldn't work it out to be home when he got back for Christmas. So he was on his own for a few days as they made their way back from a corporate retreat in Las Vegas. They wouldn't be back till midday Christmas eve, which gave him almost three full days with no pressing obligations other than gift shopping, decorating and feeding himself.

He grabbed a bunch of bananas, and a bag of oranges. He had a rented a mother-in-law apartment from another student at the academy, and Donny had insisted he stay for Thanksgiving. Donny and his wife had met in the military a few years earlier and had spent the last four years bouncing around military bases and really wanted to have a Thanksgiving in their own home for the first time. Steve had spent Thanksgiving morning watching the parades on the TV and eating oranges with their two-year old daughter as Donny and Laura cooked. That night he and Donny had stayed up far too late talking.

Steve grabbed a box of Cheerios, a loaf of bread, a pack of bologna and some cheese. He grabbed a frozen pizza for dinner and thought about dinner tomorrow, but dismissed it. He could grab some fried chicken takeout tomorrow. He made his way to the front of the store

and just as he arrived a third lane opened up. He dropped his basket on the belt and smiled at the checker. When she smiled back he checked her name tag, Hazel seemed like such an old lady name and he didn't remember her from high school. He must have made a face, because she tilted her head at him.

"Something wrong sir?" she asked

"Uh, no. Not really, but you're not from here are you?" She just smiled and rolled her eyes. "I'm not the first one to ask you that am I? Damn, sorry."

"That'll be 17.34," she said "Yeah, I moved here a few months ago and I didn't think I could be 'the new girl' for the entire town for so long." She took his twenty and made change.

"Well, I've been gone since September, so that's why I hadn't met you before, I'm Steve by the way," he said and stuck out his hand. She smirked at him, but took his hand anyway.

"Hazel, in case you're lacking basic literacy skills as well as basic social skills."

"Oof," he said as he splayed his hand on his chest, wounded. "Nice to meet you Hazel." He caught the eye of the older woman behind him in line with a full cart of baking supplies, she was unamused by his monopoly on the checkout line. "I'm so sorry, ma'am. I'll just-" and he shuffled down the counter to grab his bags. He shot one more smile at Hazel and hurried towards the door. She caught the smile, but was focused on smoothing over the annoyance of the customer he had held up. Steve smiled to himself as he shouldered the door open, exiting into the bright cold.

He drove through the neighborhood to his parents' house. He had thought a bit about getting an apartment in town after he started working. Hawkins didn't have many apartments, most were above shops in the older downtown. It didn't escape him that Hopper's first job was in New York City, a whole hell of a lot cooler than Hawkins for another five years. He had agreed to stay in Hawkins in exchange for having his training for a reduced cost, but no one had made him sign anything. He guessed they were counting on guilt to make him

keep his end of the bargain.

He slid the car into the driveway; the garage was full with his mother's Volvo and his father's new BMW. It was basically the same as the one he was driving, but four years newer. "At least your dad only upgrades cars," Donny had said after Thanksgiving, "Mine got a new wife every eight."

"He would've if he could've, Mom kept him on a short leash. She knew what she was getting into when she married him and she knew what she would have to do to keep him. And she has, gotta give her that. I mean, there are some things that I see other parents doing that mine don't do, but I suppose they love me."

"What d'ya mean? What do you see other parents doing?"

"Well, this kid I know, I mean he's a freshman in highschool, still a kid right? His mother is raising him on her own, and she doesn't know all the shit he gets up to, but she's really supportive and tells him that she loves him like every damn day. Who wouldn't want that?" Donny looked contemplatively at his beer and let a long pause linger.

"Did you know that girl that disappeared?" Donny asked quietly.

"Barbra? Yeah, man, that party she disappeared from? That was my parents place. My parents being out of town was the reason Nancy brought her over. And Nancy's guilt about that is what drove us apart."

"Wait, that girl that the Government kill't with chemicals was last seen at your place?"

"Yeah, and I told you about Nancy?"

"The girl who 'broke your heart?'" Donny mockingly put his hand over his heart and put on a pained expression for a moment "Dating that other guy now?"

"Yeah, so the thing about that guy is, his brother went missing right before Barbra. Ended up being completely unrelated, but we didn't know that at the time. So he's looking for his brother. And Nance, wracked with guilt

that she lied, convinced Barbra to lie, convinced Barbra to go to a party she didn't want to go to, on and on -and Barbra cut her hand trying to shotgun a beer because Nance did first- Nance is out looking for Barbra. They decide to join forces one night-

"Hold on, I have something you might need for this," Donny got up from the table, reached up to the the back of a top shelf in a cabinet. Down came a mason jar with a clear liquid inside. He grabbed two small juice glasses and poured them each a shot. "We never did this."

"Did what?" Steve replied, taking the glass Donny handed him. A clink of glasses and then the shine burned down his throat. Steve felt bad about coughing till Donny did too.

"Most folks from south of here, like me, still have kin back in Kentucky, let's just say they still collect the dew from up on the mountains. So your girl and this guy with the missing brother?"

"Yeah, they go out into the woods and-" he stopped short. He couldn't tell Donny what Nancy had told him, about the portal, the monster, Jonathan being the one to save her. Donny knew Barbara's death to be at the hands of a shadowy government program, not a monster from the other side of reality. "Well, I don't really know exactly what they saw, but Nancy said she saw a dying deer, and something she insisted was not a bear. But neither of them could say what it was."

"Could it have been government guys in those moon suits they use in hazardous situations? Like in E.T.?"

"I had not thought of that," he said contemplating the empty glass. "That might explain why they said it didn't have a face." Steve paused, "Wow, this stuff just hit me. Anyway, they saw this not-a-bear and a dead deer and generally had a miserable, terrifying night in the woods. You know how people bond over that sort of shit. Jonathan took Nancy home and I- I saw them sitting on the bed together and just assumed the worst. I did some stupid things. We fought, and some other shit happened, it was bad. Jonathan and I got in a fist fight and the cops caught him. Nancy and I took about a break for a month, got back together. But then about a year later Jonathan's brother got sick, and then the story about Barbara's death came out, and we just... we couldn't... I guess I wasn't what she wanted anymore." He felt it was a lame way to end the story, but most of what

really happened was too fantastical for a just-the-facts guy like Donny. "I dunno, it's all just highschool drama."

"Nah man, that's real stuff, just 'cause you're young doesn't make it less real. Laura and I had some ups and downs when we were dating, mostly because we weren't always stationed the same place. I was in Berlin and..." he trailed off. *"Fuck, we should go to bed, this stuff didn't used to hit me this hard. I guess since Lizzy came along..."* They headed off to bed after that, Donny mumbling about kids changing you.

Steve dumped his bags on the island in the kitchen and started putting things away. There was some food in the fridge, but most of it was ingredients for Christmas dinner, nothing ready to eat. He wasn't totally happy about being right about the food situation, but it would have been nice to find some Christmas cookies. He found a note on the fridge.

Steve, Honey, could you take the turkey out of the freezer in the garage and put it in the fridge to defrost? Otherwise we'll be eating Christmas dinner at midnight. Love, Mom

He finished putting away the food he bought, found the eleven pound frozen turkey and wedged it in the back of the fridge to sit for three more days. He sighed, what was he going to do for three days? At least the turkey was going to thaw, he was going to do fuck-all apparently.